

United States Senate

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COMMITTEES:
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HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS
SMALL BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

August 21, 2014

Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Duncan and Secretary Burwell:

I am writing to express my deep concern about the increasing prevalence of child trafficking in our communities and to urge the Departments of Education and Health & Human Services to take action to improve our response to the young survivors of these crimes and prevent at-risk youth from becoming victims in the future.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, between 100,000 and 300,000 children in the United States are victims of human trafficking, at an average of 11 to 14 years of age. Too many of these victims have gone unidentified, misidentified, or unreported as a result of gaps in education and training for our school personnel, health care providers, and social workers. However, with appropriate guidance, these dedicated professionals can play a critical role by preventing the proliferation of these practices and offering potentially lifesaving assistance to the children who need it most.

An expansive and thorough 2013 study conducted by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, entitled "Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States," found that both the education and health care sectors can play critical roles in identifying possible victims, and noted that the current response in these areas is "insufficient" and "considerably underdeveloped." In the field of education, the report showed that the participation of schools is important because many trafficking victims and at-risk youth continue to attend class and interact daily with teachers, counselors, and other school personnel, offering many opportunities for identification and intervention. Likewise, the study found that additional guidance in the health care field could improve the ability of providers to identify victimized youth and respond accordingly.

During a recent hearing I held on the issue of child trafficking in the Subcommittee on Children & Families, expert witnesses agreed that the provision of best practices and guidelines for communities is critical to assisting school districts, health care providers, and child welfare agencies with improving their response to child trafficking. These resources should include the appropriate tools to identify, document, educate, and counsel child victims, and incorporate training and screening tools, strategies for identification, sample protocols for cross-system

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collaboration, and recommendations for improved data collection. This information should be broadly disseminated and widely available to all practitioners and personnel who may come into contact with child victims and at-risk youth, to ensure that those frontline providers who need the guidelines most have them at their fingertips.

Child trafficking is prevalent in our communities, and it will take all of our community stakeholders coming together to address the problem. However, we need leadership from federal government agencies to raise awareness about this issue and lead the way in developing practices and procedures that will increase prevention efforts and improve identification of our trafficked youth.

I urge you to take prompt action to address the prevalence of domestic child trafficking through the provision of appropriate guidance and best practices, and to make ending this epidemic a top priority for your agencies. I further ask that you provide me with timely information regarding what initiatives your agencies have undertaken to help ensure frontline providers are properly trained to identify trafficking victims, as well as the types of data you are collecting about the scope and nature of this problem.

Sincerely,



KAY R. HAGAN
United States Senator